PhD SYNOPSIS

Title of the Thesis:

Comparative Study of Buddhist and Hindu Women in Ancient India. (500 BC – 1000 AD)

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INTRODUCTION

Women are seen as dependant minors who needed to be controlled by men in order to succeed under the influence of Hinduism. Women were subservient to men in everyday life under the practice of Hinduism. Caste system dominated the Hindu society but Buddhism had challenged the inequalities of Hindu society but practice of Hindu caste system. It had argued that the caste position and gender should not be the barrier to enlightenment which attracted women and the dalits in India. The Hindu law books are unabashedly male – centric. They suggest that women should not suffer and harassed. They also suggest that the homes in which women suffered would be without peace and happiness. In the same vain they prescribe many restrictive conditions for women that curtail their freedom. Manusmriti was very harsh against women. Women joined Buddhism to find freedom and independence from patriarchal Hindu family system. Historically the status of women in ancient India was ambiguous. In theory she had many privileges and enjoyed an exalted status as an aspect of goddess. But in practice most women led miserable lives as servants to their husbands. In the past, until the independence, Hindu men had the freedom to marry more than one wife and keep mistresses. At the same time the household women were kept in confinements as per injunctions of the law books that stipulated a women should not meet any men outside her family without a family member present. Women's role in society became better due to liberal attitude of Buddhism. Women's social status had also improved greatly due to this. In Buddhism men and women were equal in theory which caused for more rights for women. Sati was one of the most evil practices that existed in late ancient times. Upon the death of the husband women performed sati and self immolated themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands. Others who lost the husbands lived in seclusion and the widows are considered inauspicious. They are forbidden to attend any holy rituals in Hinduism. But no such restriction was imposed on widows in Buddhist religion. In Hinduism women were married at very young ages which did not allow them to finish their education under the practice of Hinduism. Due to being married at such young ages they were unable to finish their educations therefore not being able to perform many ritual sacrifices. Vedas clearly suggest that a women's primary duty is to help her husband in performing obligatory duties and enable him to continue his family tradition. Her primary duty is to give birth to his children and take care. So it is without any doubt that Hinduism is predominantly male dominated religion. Manusmiriti clearly states that as a child she lives under the protection of her father as guardians. As a wife she lives under the protection of her husband and acts as his parties, advisor and helper. As a mother she nurtures her children and shapes their destiny.

In Hinduism women like Sita, Satyavati, Draupadi, Ganga, Kunti, Shakuntalaetc played an important role in private and public. In Hinduism there is no such example of a women becoming a Nun at that time but in Buddhism anyone can become a nun and strive for ultimate liberation staying away from family known as Nibbana.While patriarchal society stayed the same women were allowed more freedoms and were seen as independent to a certain level in the Buddhist society. Overall Buddhism had allowed for women to be seen as independent and had improved women's right in society to some extent.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A careful review of the related literature and researches is an important stage in the research after selection of the topic of study.

It can be said that the purpose of review is to analyse critically a segment of a published body of knowledge through summary, classification and comparison of prior research studies, review of literatures and theoretical articles.

- Altekar A.S., 2014

The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization,

Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, Delhi (India)

In this book the author used exclusively the Arthasastra, Manusmriti, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Smriti literature and other related theological texts. He described about the status of Hindu women in the society from pre – Vedic times to the British period. He also described the role of women in various aspects within the orthodox tradition of Hindu society. In very few places the author also mentions about the status of women at the time of Buddha. But the real comperative study of the position of women of both the religion lacks here in this context.

- Horner I.B., 2007

Women under Primitive Buddhism

Laywomen and Almswomen

Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, Delhi (India)

In this book the author described the position of women in Buddhism. The author showed women in different roles in Buddhist period. The author collected dates from Therigatha, Khuddakanikaya, Theragatha, Dhammapada Commentary, Milindapanha and other Pali Texts. In this book it is stated that the position of women improved during the Buddhist age compared to the Vedic Age. But the author was unable to give a suitable example citing this. Here again the author lacks comparative analysis.

- BaruaManmatha Kumar, 2012

Ten great Ladies In Buddha's Life

Mahabodhi Book Agency, Kolkata (India)

In this book the author described about the ten most important women of Buddha's life. The book also informed us how Buddha's message gave refuge to many women, how the Bhikkhuni Sangha started, under which circumstances wife Yasodhara became a nun etc. The author here exclusively used Therigatha as the source. But when all these were happening what was the position of Hindu women at that time is not clearly mentioned in this book. So it can be said that the book here is written only from one point of view.

- Chakravarti Uma, 1987

Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism

Oxford University Press, New Delhi (India)

This book provides a vivid description of the Buddhist way of life, thinking, politics etc. The author also described in this book about the economy, society, religions milieu of that time. She describes in brief social background of Early Buddhists and the kings in the early Buddhism. From this book it is clearly illustrated how the birth related caste system of Brahminical religion changed to a work related caste system in Buddhism. In Buddhism the caste is dependant one's work or profession not on birth. The book also described about this kinship ties and the social background of the Upasakas and Bhikkhus but in this book I don't find such elaborate description of Upasikas and Bhikkhunis. But to know Buddhist society of that time the book is of great help.

- Chakravarti Uma, 2006

Everyday Lives, Everyday Histories:

Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of Ancient India

TulikaBooks,New Delhi (India)

This book helps me to a extent in the comparative study of my topic. The author describes about the Historical Sociology of ancient India, about the gender trouble in those days. One chapter is about the development of the Sita myth. So here the author decodifies the ongoing tradition. If one chapter is on Buddhism then the next one is on widowhood of Hindu woman. But again one \single chapter is not even here which can provide a comparative study of those days women as projected in different roles. Here the author vividly used the ancient texts of Buddhism and Hinduism

- Roy Kumkum,2010

The power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Exploration in Early Indian History.

Oxford University Press, New Delhi (India)

The author classified her book into two segments. The first is on Towards Histories of Gender Relations and the second is on Interrogating Textual traditions. In the first segment she described about representation of courtesenal tradition through an exploration of early historical texts and representatives of gender relations in Early India by explaining the plays of Kalidasa. She also focused on the policies of reproduction in Early India and the gender relations. In the second phase she focused in Early India and the gender relations. In the second phase she focused on marriage as communication by highlighting the narratives in Early India unraveling the Kamasutra. This book helps to know the society and critically analyse. But again though the critical study is here but the comparative analysis is locking.

- Davids Rhys MRS, 1909

I – Psalms of the Sisters

Cosmo Publications, New Delhi (India)

This book is a translation of the Therigatha. This book helps to know under which circumstances women left their house and became an ascetic. It helps to know about their suffering either in their parental household of after marriage and in some case both. This book helps to know clearly about the society of those times.

- BaruaBibhuti, 2000

Women in the Buddhist Legends

Sarup and Sons, New Delhi (India)

This book is a vast collection and complilation of ninety seven important legends relating to nature and character of women in Buddhist literature. These legends produce a marvelous effect on women of all classes who were moved by the attractive spiritual power of the Buddha's dharma and renounced the world to lead a pious life.There were a number of courtesans who led ascetic lives after listening to Buddha teachings. The women appeared to enjoy a greater amount of independence and free thinking. The author extensively used Therigatha, Vinaya exts etc. But what is before this age is not explained in this book.

- Roy Kumkum, 1999

Women in Early Indian Societies

Manohar Publishers and Distributors, (New Delhi)

This book is classified into three sections, The first section is on issues and perspectives, the second is on women and economy the third is on socio sexual constructions of womanhood and the fourth is on religious beliefs and practices. The dominant discourse of women in early Indian society derived mostly from Brahmanical normative texts, has confined women to the household. The historical experience of India in combination with the contemporary ethno – sociological realities indeed point to the need to explore plurality and to strive towards fresh perspectives on gender relations. Even within the segment of Indian society which is bounded by the patriarchy of the varna based social order, stridharma or the ideal of womenhood is historical product emerging out of patriarchy's necessity to subordinate women through the social and ideological control of sexuality.

- Sharma Achla, 2014

Status of Women: A Socio – Historical analysis in different ages of India Society.

Department of Social Sciences, Jaipur National University, Jaipur (India)

In this article the writer focused on the position of women in various spheres of life as daughters, wife, etc. She also discussed political, religious, economic and other spheres also. She described the position of women taking citations from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Manusmriti, Arthasastra, SusrutaSamhita and other religious texts. She also used quotations from the above books. In this article gender relations in early India has also been described but very brief mention is there about Buddhist women. She just used a single paragraph to describe the status of women in Buddhism. She also mentioned about medieval period and

also post independence. But from the writings it is clear that she focused mainly on Hinduism. So it can be said that the writing is mainly based one sided.

REASONS FOR SELECTING THIS TOPIC

The main reason behind selection of this topic is I have a keen interest in Buddhism. I would like to do a comparative analysis of the position and status of women in Buddhism with that of Hinduism. I have gone through many books and articles, journals about women in Buddhism and Hinduism. But I have not found not a single book that focused on the comparative analysis of women in these two religions. Some few books throws some light on the socio – religion context of that ancient time on a comparative basis but not on the status of women. So I would like to do this topic as it can create a new opening in this sphere of study about women and their aspirations.

OBJECTIVES

My objectives of research are as follows:

- How the position of women are depicted in both the religion on a comparative basis.
- How the male – centric society dominate the women comparatively.
- How far the women in both the religion can express freely their choice.
- How the patriarchal society overlooked women in both religions.
- Comparative analysis of their representation in various roles.
- Women working under continuous hegemonic authority.
- Comparative exclusion of the rights of women of that time.
- Comparative analysis of how for the aspirations of these women get fulfilled in both religions.
- Comparative analysis of how the women work in patriarchal social set up.

CHAPTERIZATION

In ancient times in all religions the birth of a daughter is unwelcome. The same is here also. In Buddhism the birth of a daughter is neither regretted nor welcome. But there is no literary evidence to show that the boys are more welcome than girls. The adoption of daughters was also there. In Buddhism a women not entitled to marriage can remain unmarried without running the gauntlet of public scorn.1 In Brahmin literature there is one passage observing that while the son is the hope of the family the daughter is the source of trouble.2 The Atharvaveda contains charms and rituals to ensure the birth of a son in preference to that of a daughter. But some thinkers pointed out that at talented and a well behaved daughter may be better than a son. Once the temporary feeling of disappointment was over the family took keen interest in the daughter as it did in the son. Education for girls was there in both the religions. But in course of time widow remarriage prohibited, from 5th century AD Sati Custom arrived. So the people started preferring son over the daughter. My first chapter is on the Comparative Analysis of the Position of Women as Daughter in Buddhism and Hinduism in Ancient India.

During the Buddhist period marriage was monogamous like in the Vedic age3 but polygamy was not condemned which was common among the higher classes. The Dhammapada commentory4 states that a husband might take a second wife if the first came to him empty handed. Some duties and responsibilities of wife has been mentioned like as the mistress of the establishment she was to be given the honourable duties of undertaking headship and responsibility. She had to take care for those dear to her husband, perform the domestic duties properly, take charge of the servants and treat them when they were ill and she was to mind her husband's treasures, gold and silver. She should be virtous and observe the five precepts of morality. As a lay devotee she should take her refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. She should be filled with insight. But inspite of all these still she was often regarded as his inferior and his possession was never fit for independence. A Vedic passage says that a person who is unmarried is unholy5. The marriage of girls came to be compared with the Upanayana of the boys. There were references of beautiful brides selecting their own husbands. Monogamy was generally practiced but polygamy was there among high rich ones. Divorce was there at that time. Some duties need to be performed by the wife like she need to be open hearted to her husband, respectful to his brothers and sisters, devoted to his mother, affectionate towards his relations, considerate towards the servants, smiling even to her co – wives, courteous to her husbands friends and hateful to his enemies6. The mention of co – wives suggest that polygamy was also practiced. My second chapter is on the Comparative Analysis of the Position of Women as Wife in Buddhism and Hinduism in Ancient India.

A Jataka passage testifies, "A mother like a sire should be with reverend honour crowned"7. Here she is represented as enjoying exactly the same position as she held in ancient India where woman as mother commanded a respect otherwise unknown to her. In

KiraGotami'sinstance it is seen that she was referred as nobody's daughter till she bear a son. After that everyone paid her respect and honour. Motherhood has been the cherished ideal of Hindu women. Specially the birth of a son immediately heightens her status. Prayer is offered in the marriage ritual that the couple may be blessed with sons and grandsons. Childlessness is regarded as a great misfortune8 and every effort was made to overcome it. What a childless women looks on, gods to do accept. Motherhood has been highly respected in India but bearing a male child is more welcome in both Buddhist and Hindu families in those periods. My third chapter is on the Comparative Analysis of the Position of Women as Mother in Buddhism and Hinduism in Ancient India.

In Buddhism a widow suffered no moral degradation as a consequence of her widowhood. Her life of course has changed but there was no ensuring alteration in her social status. It had not to be advertised by any such signs such as shaving the head and the relinquishment of the wearing of jewellery and coloured apparel. Austerities such as eating, fasting at specific times and sleeping on mats on the floor, absenting herself from domestic ceremonies is not there in Buddhism. She does not become impure or untouchable or a dreaded creature of ill omen. Still her state was incomplete. She often termed as anatha meaning unprotected, destitute etc. She has the liberty of joining the Sangha as a nun. Several passages in the Therigatha and the commentary and other books show that the wealth was not necessarily left to the male relatives but could pass into female hands to be held by them. In Hinduism a widow is required to wear white saree. The presence of widows at religious ceremonies is considered inauspicious. Widows are expected to devote their lives to an austere pursuit of religion. These restrictions are mainly seen in the higher caste. A very evil custom of Sati once prevailed in Hindu society. The widows could not inherit the property of her husband. After his death it passed on to her sons. But they should live under the protecting care of her mother after father's death. She was in fact their defacto guardian. My fourth chapter is on the Comparative Analysis of the Position of Women as Widows in Buddhism and Hinduism in Ancient India.

Though majority of the women are supported by children, husband and father but few examples were there about the working woman. In Buddhist texts there were examples of women as the keeper of paddy field, working in cotton fields9, keepers of burning ground etc. They also work as domestic slaves. But for some girls who were without protectors a life of prostitution was an obvious course to pursue. There were examples of courtesans. Four courtesans having been committed to Buddhism entered the order and attained Arahantship. There were examples where a courtesan gave valuable presents and gifts to the Sangha. In Samhitas there were reference to female workers in dying embroidery and basket making. There were also women who teaches known as Acharya. Medical career was selected by some women. Gargi, Maitrayee are names of some women scholars. Some women joined the profession of courtesan. Some joined as dancing girls in temples. The famous temple of Somnatha is said to have employed five hundred dancing girls in order to provide music before the deity continuously throughout day and night. Some women also served as parasol bearers, door keepers, guards and hair dressers in royal courts.10 but these careers probably

were not open to women of higher classes. My fifth chapter is on the Comparative Analysis of the Position of Women as Worker in Buddhism and Hinduism in Ancient India and in the concluding chapter I will sum up my findings.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology I would like to implement in this research is it involves collection of literatures, collection of journals, publications, articles and a critical content analysis of the literature by using the qualitative method. Research design will be exploratory and descriptive. My methodology will comprise of both primary and secondary data. As it is a work on religion so both primary and secondary data are important for my course of research. I have to read and understand the literature between the lines to explore the undiscovered past about the comparative status of women in both religions in different roles of that period. In some areas I also need to use both qualitative and quantitative methods. So a portion of my research can also be based on a mixed methodology.

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2) Aitareya Brahmana – VII – 18

3) Apastamba, ii.5.II, 12-14

4) Dhammapada Commentary on Verse 82

5) Taittiriya Brahmana II, 2,2,6

6) Balaramayana, IV, 44

7) Jataka 532

8) Satapatha Brahmana V, 3,i,13

9) Jataka 546

10) A.S. Altekar – The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization, Delhi, 2014, p – 182.

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